

## **“Characteristics of Commitment,” Part 3 - 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 – June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

- Today's teaching will be part three of a series I've titled, "Characteristics of Commitment."
- It's abundantly clear in our study through this chapter, that the Apostle Paul had an unwavering commitment to winning the lost.
- As such, he seemingly rises from the pages of scripture as an example of what it takes to be totally committed to Jesus Christ.

### **1. Selflessness (Verses 19-21)**

- Here, Paul tells them that, of his own volition, he becomes like a slave to everyone to win as many as possible to Jesus Christ.

### **2. Sacrifice (Verses 22-23)**

- Paul says that he became weak to win the weak, and for the sake of the gospel became all things to all people to save some.

### **3. Sweat (Verses 24-27)**

- v24 Paul asks if they know in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize, then says, run in such a way for that prize.
- v25 He says all who compete in the games go into strict training to get a crown that won't last, but our crown will last forever.
- v26-27 He says this is why he doesn't run aimlessly or box beating the air. He makes his body his slave so he's not disqualified.

- In order for us to better understand why Paul uses these analogies, it's important to know a little about the Corinthian culture.
- The first thing we need to know is Corinth was a sports crazed culture, which is something we know nothing about in our day.
- In all seriousness, when it came to sporting events, the Corinthians took it very seriously and took great pride and prestige in it.

- The second thing we need to know about their sports crazed culture is that the city of Corinth was host to the Isthmian Games.
- The Isthmian Games were the second most important sporting events in the world next to the Olympic games we have today.
- It's for this reason that the Apostle Paul makes comparisons to these games on no less than twelve occasions in his epistles.

- Another thing we need to know about these games is that those who competed in them would enter strict training for one year.
- The athletes would arrive in the city prior for the sole purpose of subjecting themselves to a strict and grueling training regiment.
- In this training, not only would they work to master their sport, they would master their bodies by deprivation and perspiration.

One commentator wrote, "During their ... training, these athletes exercised self-control in regard to everything, sleep, food, drink, sex, exercise, etc., and then in the races they continued to exercise mastery. They, in their training and in their running, rejected all things, good or bad, that would hinder them in winning the race. All who hoped to win the prize exercised this self-mastery."

Of this another commentator added, "You must ...live by rule, eat what will be disagreeable, refrain from delicacies; you must oblige yourself to constant exercises at the appointed hour, in heat and cold; you must abstain from wine and cold liquors; in a word, you must be as submissive to all direction of your master as to those of a physician."

- There's one last thing we need to know about these games in order to understand the application of this to our Christian lives.
- In these games, there was only one winner. Unlike the Olympic games today, there were no 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> silver or bronze medals.
- And, the only winner didn't receive a gold medal; they received a crown that was either made of pine branches or celery leaves.

- Now that we have a better idea of what these games were about, we can start the process of applying it personally to our lives.
- Perhaps you'll indulge me as I seek to connect the dots, as it were, starting with the first one, which is that of winning the prize.
- When Paul says all run but only one gets the prize, he's saying in order to win it; you have to be in it to win it. It's all or nothing!

What follows are three true stories' that speak to this, (1) A sport shoe company ran an advertisement during the 1996 Olympics, with the line, "You do not win the silver medal, you lose the gold!" (2) The legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers, Vince Lombardi, said, "Winning is not everything, it is the only thing." (3) The epitaph of a boxer ...from Alexandria ...found on a funerary monument at Olympia in Greece said: "Here he died boxing in the stadium having prayed to Zeus for a wreath or death. Age 35. Farewell." <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2012/07/16/Going-for-the-Gold-The-Apostle-Paul-and-the-Isthmian-Games.aspx#Article>

- This brings us to our second one, which is that of going into strict training not for a perishable crown, but one that lasts forever.
- What Paul is saying is if they will train that hard just to win a perishable crown, how much more should we for an eternal crown.
- Actually, Paul is speaking of this experientially as an example of one who practiced that which he preached in 2 Timothy 4:7-8.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 (NIV) — 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

- That brings us to our third and final one, which is that of our willingness to subject ourselves to deprivation and perspiration.
- This is what Paul means when he says he strikes a blow to his body to make it a slave, so he won't be disqualified for the prize.
- Please know that he's not saying one can lose their salvation, rather, he's saying that one can be disqualified and lose rewards.

- It's interesting to note how that Paul uses the metaphor of a runner running aimlessly, or a fighter who is shadow boxing the air.
- The reason that I find this so interesting is because Paul paints a picture of someone who is merely going through the motions.
- In other words, their heart isn't really in it. I would suggest the reason their heart isn't in it, is that their eyes aren't on the prize.

- I'll close with a question that every one of us would do well to ask our self as it relates to these requirements for commitment.
- Are the eternal rewards that await me, enough to motivate me, to do what ever it takes, to finish the race so as to win the prize?